

The Mount Sainte-Victoire: The possible impacts of Cézanne on modern paintings

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Abstract. As the "father of modern painting", Cézanne's creative ideas and techniques have had a profound influence on subsequent generations of artists. To this day, many artists still admire his creative and revolutionary painting theories. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the techniques and ideas of Cézanne's series of paintings around the Mount Sainte-Victoire and to explore his inspiration for subsequent artists to break through the constraints of traditional painting techniques and creatively express their subjective consciousness by using flat shapes, multi-point perspective, and multiple painting types. In this way, we can clarify the position of Cézanne in art history and the inspiration his ideas and works have brought to people. This paper is divided into two parts, the first part is about the analysis of the concept, technique and style of Cézanne's landscapes with the Mount Sainte-Victoire as the theme; the second part is about the specific distinction and explanation of the succession and development of Cézanne's style by modern artists represented by Picasso, Matisse and Klimt.

Keywords: Cézanne, Mount Sainte-Victoire, Modern Painting.

1. Introduction

Politics is the concentrated expression of economy, and culture is a reflection of both economy and politics. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution at the end of the 19th century, France launched the bourgeois revolution in 1831 and 1848, and its influence spread throughout Europe [1]. The revolutionary movement of the Paris Commune in 1871 showed the rise of the proletariat as a major force in the political arena. France not only led the political and intellectual movements throughout Europe in the 19th century but also set off new trends and movements in the arts, such as Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Symbolism [2, 3]. At the end of the 19th century, the field of fine art became more expressive, symbolic and abstract, concerned with formal beauty and decorative effects. At the end of the century when the old was destroyed and the new was established, Cézanne (1839-1906), a French painter famous at present but almost unknown in his times, emerged. Although Cézanne was known as the 'father of modern painting' by later generations, it was not until his death that people realized his great and unique talent [4]. In his early years, Cézanne was an impressionist, but he didn't want to be bound by the rules of impressionism. Cézanne was like a revolutionary. When a revolutionary wanted to destroy something of the old system to explore a new one, differences and conflicts inevitably arose. Raphael did the same in his day, but he had a whole century of tradition to back it up, whereas Cézanne had to single-handedly establish a new one—or, as we now think, to rebuild a lost tradition. The people of the time didn't appreciate, even reject or abuse Cézanne for his impure impressionistic approach to painting. Cézanne thought impressionism was fickle and fleeting, and he wanted to find eternal truth. Eventually, at the age of 43, Cézanne retired to his hometown, Aix-en-Provence, where he completed over 70 works at the foot of Mont Sainte-Victoire.

Cézanne's passion for art and the pursuit of his ideals were evident in his works for the rest of his life [5]. In his twilight years, Cézanne was still carrying his painting tools outside to work on the puzzles he had given himself throughout his life: How to balance the structure and order of a picture

without destroying the vivid and rich colors of the Impressionist? How to arrange a picture in such a way that it doesn't revert to having every detail with the rationality of Classicism or the disorder of Impressionism? How do obtain a stable frame effect in which color and shape return to the structural order of the object itself? Although studies on his art mysteries and reports on his achievements abound, this paper intends to explore how Cézanne solved these problems in the painting and influenced future generations by analyzing his *Mont Sainte-Victoire* created in 1902, which is collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York now. This paper also illustrates Cézanne's contributions to modern painting. Klimt, a symbolist, adopted simplified painting techniques and generalized forms for patterns and blocks, which is viewed as the recognition of Cézanne's explorations. Inspired by Cézanne, the fauvist Matisse, made free explorations and subjective pursuit of planes to view structure as the theme of paintings based on the shock from forms and the perception of colors. Based on Cézanne, the cubist Picasso could show the obsession with the use of geometric shapes and the sense of rhythm created by geometric shapes, making it possible for later generations to extract geometrical forms from objects based on individual understanding, so that the painters can explore and change shapes, patterns, and lines freely on the 2D canvas without being constrained by the realistic reproduction of three-dimensional space.

2. Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire*

Cézanne lingered around Paris and Moulins before 1882, and until October 1882, he made a long observation and exploration of the Saint-Victor Mountain series in Aix, the creation of which was also the epitome of Cézanne's thinking process on natural scenery. In 1882-1885, Cézanne created *Mont Sainte-Victoire* and the *Viaduct of the Arc River Valley* [6]. As the early creation of the *Mont Saint-Victor* series, this work still clearly shows the three-dimensional spatial relationship between objects. The warm yellow and light green trees with the medium yellow houses directly pull the line of sight to the closest distance. In the middle of the scene, a tall tree coming out of the bushes to the right breaks the diagonal composition connecting the upper left canopy and the lower right bushes. The viaduct in the middle shot gradually turns gray from the light yellow in the middle to the right and fades from the center of the picture to all sides. Although the mountain in the distant view uses warm light pink, it has a clear virtual-real contrast with the mountain in the middle view and cold-warm contrast with the green leaves in the foreground. The perspective relationship from wide to thin of the path winding like a branch in the middle deepens the depth of the picture. The reproduction of nature is still evident in the expressive approach. By around 1885, the personal style of Cézanne in landscape painting gradually matured, and the characteristics of geometric analysis became more prominent. Cézanne's *The Montagne Sainte-Victoire with a Large Pine*, created in 1885-1887, brought the three-dimensional closer to the two-dimensional. The spatial distance is subjectively shortened, although the front and middle views remain clear. In the foreground, it seems that the tree trunk extending out of the picture forms a triangle with the canvas edge, and the branches extending to the right and the branches extending from the right form a ring to echo the mountains stretching in the distant view. The edge line of the bright yellow house in the middle scene is set off very clearly by the green bushes. The right edge of the house is also accentuated by the darker shades of emerald and ultramarine that depict the trees. The dark side on the left side of the house and the shadow under the eaves use purple and blue, which form a strong contrast with the yellow of the house. According to the real color principle of Impressionism, the dark side around the bushes should be greenish tone. However, to narrow the distance between the middle scene and the foreground, Cézanne subjectively dealt with the color of the dark side of the house. Compared with the contrast between yellow and green, the complementary color contrast between yellow and purple is more intense and obvious. The distant mountain is no longer blurred but highlights the shape of the mountain with obvious edge lines. From 1902 to 1906, the planarization tendency of Cézanne's paintings became an important feature. During this period, the forms in Cézanne's paintings were more concise and devoted to seeking change and rhythm in the mundane, and those simplified lines and color blocks were

undoubtedly the most important precursors of Mondrian. Cézanne expressed structure and form with bold strokes and layered geometries in Mont Saint-Victoire.



Figure 1. Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Viaduct of the Arc River Valley, On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 826, Paul Cézanne, Oil on canvas, 65.4 x 81.6 cm



Figure 2. The Montagne Sainte-Victoire with a Large Pine, On view at The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust), The Courtauld, Paul Cézanne, Oil on canvas, 67 x 92.5cm

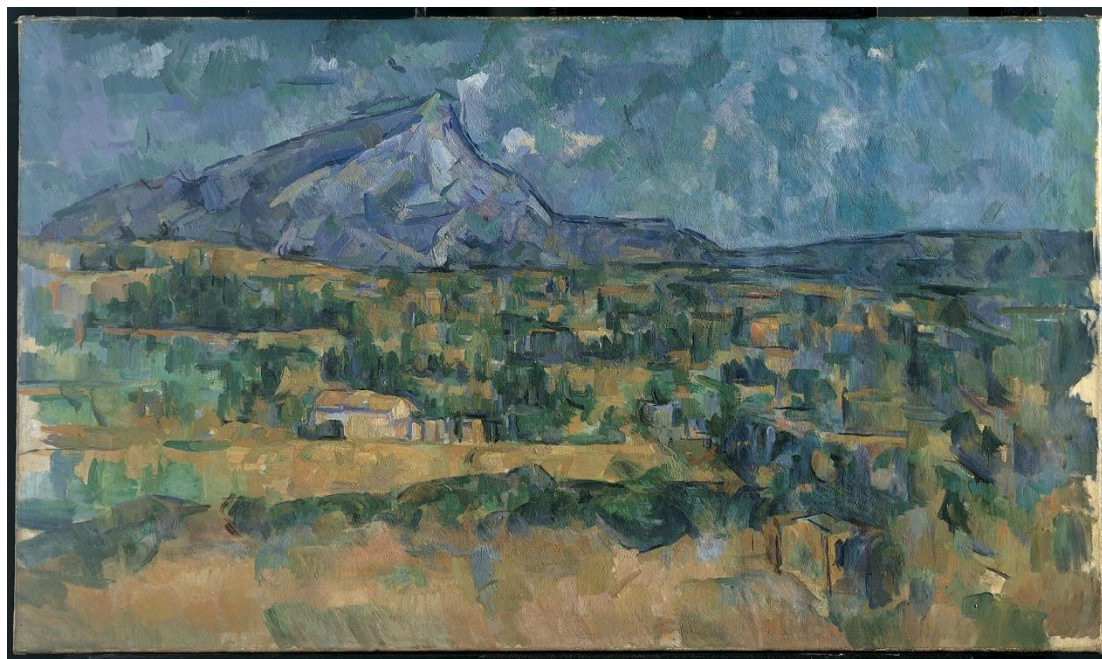


Figure 3. Mont Sainte-Victoire, On view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 823, Paul Cézanne, Oil on canvas, 57.2 x 97.2 cm

The whole painting is presented with a large number of color blocks, especially mountains by solid attached color blocks. The brushstrokes which successfully portray the mountain are very daring. Even though the brushstrokes might be a little bit dull, it ensures the mountain is to be distinct from the sky. His attempt to see and grasp the nature of the mountain before him is based on the strength of his gaze and the rigor of his thinking. According to the observation and painting method of impressionism, the mountain behind should not be expressed with such "solid" brushstrokes but should be "imaginary" to the back along with the background color of the sky to create a deep sense of space. But Cézanne opposed Impressionism to destroying the solid structure and sense of the persistence of objects due to obsession with light and color. Cézanne used color blocks to express the volume of objects, and geometric factors to shape the structure for thick and tight structures. Despite the heavy, clumsy, and oppressive feelings, it is full of compositional beauty and power. The ground and the grove of trees show distinct vertical and horizontal lines that contrast with the triangles of the mountains and the irregularly shaped geometric blocks of the sky. Although the blue-gray tones of the mountain are similar to the sky, the edge of the mountain is very solid and clear, the concave and convex are unambiguously depicted, and the ridges and valleys and even the boundary between light and dark are clear. The space tends to be two-dimensional with contour lines. He longed for two-dimensional truth, not for three-dimensional technique. As for the blue-gray tones of the sky and the mountains and the earthy yellow of the ground, the contrasting relationship between the cold and the warm is shown, creating the flow of air, which is contradictory and harmonious.

On the mountain, the square brush strokes paved with the trend of the structure and the thin lines that imply the structure, on the left side of the sky, the brush strokes that float on the surface and break the original bottom layer, and on the right side of the sky, the brush strokes that do not have a definite shape and rub the paint into the canvas obliquely, tiny vertical lines of heavy paint in the bushes and dotted strokes hidden in the shadows, thin wet brush strokes diluted by turpentine and dry brush strokes rubbed on the picture after it is dry. The diverse and setting-off brushstrokes not only create the atmosphere of the picture but also enrich the rhythm of the landscape painting. Cézanne simplifies the spatial hierarchy of the trees with the stacking of fine pen color blocks but activates the balance in the staggered extension with the ground. The contrast between the large yellow patches on the ground and the undulating green trees seems to show the "reflection" of the mountains.

All these trends, arrangements, connections, transformations and interlacing of the brushstrokes constitute space and structure, forming a contrasting and harmonious order. In front of this painting,

we can understand Cézanne 's attempt to reformulate the object image disintegrated by the fuzzy brushstrokes of Impressionism upon visual elements such as color blocks, brushstrokes and contour lines. The whole painting is solemn, noble, and slightly melancholy, in which Cézanne 's passion and anger are condensed into stable and solid brushstrokes to reflect his profound spiritual world. In this painting, each block and shape are treated in such a solid manner, reminiscent of apples depicted in his still life painting. At times Cézanne seemed to be representing figures and landscapes like that still life painting. He left his thoughts in each color block through brushstrokes as if he was venting, exploring and touching. Cézanne spent 20 years interpreting this Saint-Victor Mountain many times [6]. Finally, the master of art who had been slandered, reviled, insulted, and misunderstood in the history of French painting and was later recognized by the world quietly passed away on October 12, 1906 [6]. In Cézanne 's mature works, even simple apples may show a clear sculptural sense. Each of his still life, landscape, or portrait is analyzed from several perspectives rather than one perspective, making future cubists see him as a true mentor.

3. Cézanne's influence on modern painting artists

In the 20th century Western modern art, artists used a richer and more diverse form of painting to express their thoughts on real-life and emotions. From this period onward, the copying of nature and the imitation of previous works were greatly reduced, and the artist's subjective consciousness and spirit were more directly presented in artworks, all of which originated from Cézanne, the "father of modern painting". Before him, artworks were measured by the objective world, and the artists' mission was to imitate and express nature to the greatest extent possible. Their understanding of the world was based on the ancient Greek concept of Euclidean geometry, that is, the linear, sequential concept of space. In Cézanne's case, this concept was updated. Cézanne was a painter who followed his senses and intuition, believing that a work of art should be the result of the artist's experience of nature with his mind, rather than a rigid imitation of it. This concept of creation faithful to one's feelings broke down and dissolved the various rules and constraints in traditional painting, creating an open platform for modern painting since then, allowing artists to create various forms of diverse paintings freely, which is why many artists in early modern painting were more or less influenced by Cézanne.

One of Cézanne's influences on later artists was his deconstructionism, which was inherited and developed by the Cubist artists represented by Picasso, resulting in the "deconstruction and reconstruction" approach to modeling [7]. Picasso inherited Cézanne's geometric representation of nature and multipoint perspective, but it is noteworthy that his paintings draw on, or intentionally misinterpret, Cézanne's theories to polarize the forms of flat shapes and colors and finally reconstruct a new reality [8]. Cézanne's works still respect the reality of flat shapes of objects in nature and still have the concept of three-dimensional space. But despite this, Cézanne's influence on Picasso is still undeniable.

Another profound influence of Cézanne's creative philosophy and technique was the pursuit of flatness, represented by Matisse of the Fauvists [9]. Matisse once said, "My style was shaped by Cézanne and the Orient". The most prominent common denominator between these two is the sense of flatness. In Matisse's paintings, the traditional form of three-dimensional space disappears completely, leaving only the decorative image of flat color and the free use of line. In his famous painting "The Red Room," the works hung on the wall and placed in the corner look like paper or patterns clinging to the wall, without any three-dimensional space or three-dimensional volume to speak of. From the overall view of the picture, there is no spatial depth at all, only red color filling the picture.

The break from the traditional atmospheric perspective is one of Cézanne's greatest artistic achievements. Before Cézanne, works of art were measured by the objective world, so it was the responsibility of the artist to imitate nature and represent it to the maximum extent possible, and their understanding of the world was based on the concept of space in ancient Greek Euclidean geometry.

Usually, for example, in a landscape painting, one would expect to see the mountains in the distant sky fading away, the colors darkening, and the brush strokes blurring because this is consistent with nature and the laws of visual perception. Cézanne, however, turned this theory on its head, as we can see in this painting of Mount Sainte-Victoire, which he painted between 1902 and 1904, where Cézanne treats the close and distant views almost identically, using only color to reflect distance, such as blue-brown in the foreground, red and green in the mid-ground, and blue in the distance, with a very arbitrary connection between color and position. Cézanne makes the picture more blurred by disrupting the color distribution of the parts, for example, he blends the grayish-purple of the foreground into the distant sky to make the distant sky forward. This way of painting is undoubtedly subversive and experimental, and although it still reflects a certain spatial depth in the picture, it does close the distance of space and reflects a tendency of flatness. So we can vaguely feel from this painting the influence of Cézanne on later modern masters such as Matisse and Klimt in terms of the sense of space, that is, the pursuit of the flat effect in the picture. Even in this painting of Mount St. Victoire, this tendency of flatness from three dimensions to two dimensions is still in a hazy state, and Cézanne's real intention and creative concept are not reflected in the flatness, but this does not prevent Cézanne from challenging the authority and subverting the traditional way of painting, which was creatively interpreted by the later painters [10]. In addition, due to the popularity of flat perspective in Oriental painting at that time, flatness had become an artistic consciousness by the Fauvist period. Matisse once said, "My style was shaped by Cézanne and the Orient". In Matisse's paintings, the traditional form of three-dimensional space completely disappears, leaving only the decorative image of flat colors and the free use of lines. In Matisse's famous painting "The Red Room," the works of varying sizes hanging on the wall cling to it like paper and blocks of color, with no sense of three-dimensionality at all; the furniture in the room is only outlined in thin yellow lines, with a low sense of presence. In general, in this painting, the traditional sense of form in three-dimensional space almost completely disappears, and the whole picture only has the free use of lines and large areas of red. Another school of painting that pursues flat effects is the Vienna Secession, one of whose most representative artists is Klimt. In his masterpiece "The Kiss", although the appearance of the figures is very realistic, the background and the shapes of the figures are more abstract. The figures' torsos are elongated to look slenderer; the robes on the figures are deliberately flattened and covered with various delicate geometric patterns, which look strongly decorative.

4. Conclusions

In general, Cézanne's profound reflection on the nature of objects, his expression of his feelings and consciousness, and his technique of using geometric figures to represent all natural objects and to transform the picture from three to two dimensions are extremely groundbreaking, innovative, and experimental, which are all reflected in his dozens of landscapes depicting the Saint-Victor Mountains. As a giant of Post-Impressionism, Cézanne allowed many subsequent modern artists to stand on his shoulders and express themselves more freely in all genres. This spirit of emphasizing freedom and independent views, of daring to innovate and defy authority, is still instructive and educational in contemporary society.

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